A Learning Alberta

Shaping the Future Direction of the Advanced Education System

A Discussion Document

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A Learning Alberta

Alberta will be a province where all Albertans have access to higher learning opportunities. It will be a province that aggressively seizes the opportunities of the future by leveraging the skills, talents and imaginations of its citizens. And it will be a province that will enjoy even greater success in the century ahead thanks to a solid foundation and legacy of higher learning that we will create together.

Albertans will be inspired to reach their full potential through advanced learning - to move beyond where they are now to where they can be. But most of all, Alberta will become a true learning province, where advanced education and lifelong learning is the cornerstone of a healthy, prosperous and progressive society.

Dave Hancock, Riverbend Ragg-Times

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1 Introduction

1.1 The *A Learning Alberta* Context

The Minister of Advanced Education has initiated a comprehensive initiative to establish a new direction for Alberta's advanced education system. This initiative, *A Learning Alberta*, will identify a new vision and policy outcomes for the system. Together the vision and policy framework will work towards the creation of a learning society in Alberta – one that inspires and motivates all Albertans to participate in advanced education learning opportunities throughout their lifetime – to maximize their own potential, and their contributions to society, Alberta's economy, and future generations.

To assist in the development of the vision and policy framework, several other discussion documents have been prepared including: *Ensuring Affordability in Alberta's Advanced Education System*; *Investing in Alberta's Advanced Education System*; and *Advanced Education in Rural Alberta: Challenges and Opportunities*. Each discussion document identifies key issues, challenges and opportunities.

This discussion document provides a context for considering opportunities and challenges related to the providers of advanced learning opportunities, and more specifically, how the system could be shaped. It is intended to stimulate discussion and generate feedback as to whether the advanced education system is configured appropriately to respond to future challenges and opportunities, and most importantly, to the future needs of learners. The discussion document is also supported by the *Profile of Alberta's Advanced Education System*, which provides historical data for further context and consideration.

1.2 Process and Feedback

The responses to this discussion document will be used to provide feedback to the *A Learning Alberta* steering committee. This committee was established by the Minister to guide development of a new system vision and policy framework for Alberta's advanced education system. It is anticipated that a preliminary vision and policy outcomes will be presented for validation at the Minister's Forum, scheduled for the Fall of 2005. Individuals and groups interested in providing comments to this document may submit responses no later than August 19, 2005 to:

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Alternatively, submissions can be provided by e-mail to: alearning.alberta@gov.ab.ca.

1.3 Policy Context

The Government of Alberta has made clear its commitment to advanced education through its twenty-year strategic plan, *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*. The strategic plan recognizes Leading in Learning and Unleashing Innovation as key pillars for Alberta's future growth and prosperity, necessitating a fundamental role for the advanced education system. Under the *Access to the Future Act*, Alberta is establishing a foundation to guide advanced education into the new millennium. The new Access to the Future Fund, a key aspect of the Act, will work to increase funding for students and providers of learning opportunities with an objective of expanding access by 60,000 learning opportunities by 2020.

Our ability to increase participation on a bold scale will, in large part, depend upon our ability to increase participation among disadvantaged Albertans, including Aboriginal people, rural populations, the disabled, and others. This depends upon much more than investment – it depends on our ability to work collaboratively with the entire system to create a learning society and inspire all Albertans with the importance of higher learning. The Alberta government's *Rural Development Strategy* also recognizes that higher levels of participation and educational attainment levels in rural areas are fundamental to increasing the capacity of communities to engage in successful social, economic, and community development.

Clearly, it is through the investment and strategies that we establish today that will create a learning society that sets Alberta apart. We have an obligation to future generations to build that foundation to ensure that all Albertans can maximize their full potential and give back to their communities.

2 Context and Background Information

2.1 The Alberta Advanced Education System – Shaping Future Direction

The key objective of this paper is to generate feedback on the structure of the system, how the various providers work as a system, and how the system can evolve over time. We need to ensure our system is configured appropriately to achieve policy outcomes: provide for quality opportunities that are relevant to the needs of current and future learners and allow for affordable access. We need to ensure our system is robust and can adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

One of the key challenges is in ensuring that the system operates as a system – an interdependent group of providers forming a unified whole. There is a diverse range of providers of advanced education opportunities within Alberta. Each brings something unique, for example, in terms of the programs offered, the region served, role within the community, the way in which they interact with the community, and the client group served. There is no question that diversity is an important feature of any system. However, it is also recognized that the system can achieve much more through

collaborative action and by working in concert to achieve common objectives. The sum of the whole is worth more than the individual sum of the parts – is highly relevant in the context of a learner-centered system.

On a strategic level, the Ministry's role is to provide the necessary leadership to facilitate the partnerships and to work with stakeholders to achieve policy outcomes. There are a number of mechanisms currently in place to support the needs of the learner, including for example, frameworks to support and maintain quality, allow for transferability of programs among providers, allow for articulation and portability of credentials and the creation of new programs. In thinking about a future vision for the system, and in considering how the external environment will influence learning, it is important to consider the mechanisms through which the Ministry facilitates system direction and planning and how these mechanisms might evolve to respond to future needs.

In other discussion papers, and particularly, the *Profile of Alberta's Advanced Education System*, it is clear that if we are to be successful expanding access to learning opportunities for those that have historically been under-represented, our system will need to respond accordingly. Do we have the right mix of programs (certificate, degree, diploma, apprenticeship, graduate level studies) to support the needs of learners? Do we have the right mix of institutions (university transfer institutions, degree providers)? To what extent is our system equipped to meet the needs of non-traditional learners? To what extent does our system allow for fluid transition of learners from the basic education system into advanced education, or allow for transition to and from the work world into the advanced education system? Is our system equipped to allow for recognition of informal training or competencies acquired through on-the-job training?

One of the key challenges of any system is to maximize access and quality, while allowing for sustainability of the system for future generations. It is not feasible for the full breadth of programs to be available within all regions of the province; not including specializations and majors, there are over 1,100 approved programs being offered throughout the public system alone. It is neither sustainable for every program to be available in each region nor to be designed and delivered on site. As well, given that the number of earned doctorates awarded in Canada will not replace the expected faculty who will retire over the next decade, our approaches to expanding access within Alberta, including regional access, will need to be carefully considered. To what extent can accessibility objectives be achieved through effective application of technology, rather than traditional delivery models? To what extent can providers make effective use of programs that have already been developed in other institutions?

One approach relating to the enhancement of quality is to foster more actively the development of centres of excellence within the system, whether learning or research centres of excellence. Doing so may allow for a critical mass to be established in key areas of strength, potentially in areas where Alberta has a strategic advantage.

Concentration of expertise may enhance Alberta's capacity for innovation and our ability to compete globally, as well as our ability to attract and retain faculty, researchers, graduate students, and even investment. On another level, the creation of learning centres of excellence may be a framework through which learning curricula and best practices can be more readily shared among institutions.

Our ability to maximize access, quality and ensure a sustainable system requires a strategic approach to system planning and development. It will depend upon our ability to foster collaboration, leverage the use of technology, and establish a strong framework to guide future system development.

2.2 Draft Principles

In considering future trends and issues pertaining to the system of providers, as well as potential changes to mechanisms that are in place to facilitate system direction, it is first important to consider the principles, objectives and desired policy outcomes to help frame the discussion. These are draft principles, which draw heavily from other documents produced by Alberta Advanced Education in various contexts. It is important to consider these principles as a framework to guide future system change.

Accountable: the advanced education system is accountable to Albertans for quality results, system sustainability, and fiscal responsibility.

Collaboration: partners and stakeholders work together to provide a holistic approach and a supportive environment at the system-wide and local levels.

Community-based: communities must play a lead role in determining their needs for learning opportunities.

Innovation: beyond technology or research and development, innovation is fundamentally about people and how they develop new ideas and creative solutions. Innovative practices will improve learner participation, achievement, satisfaction with the learning process, and consequently, learner outcomes.

International Outlook: Alberta must compete in an increasingly dynamic global environment. It is a priority for government to ensure reliable export markets, keep Alberta competitive, develop the future supply of knowledgeable and skilled workers, and ensure the participation of communities throughout the province. The system must be international in its outlook and focus.

Learner-centered: activities of the advanced education system support learners' participation in learning and the achievement of learning outcomes. The learner is at the centre of Alberta's advanced education system. Increasingly, learners will have greater responsibility to identify their learning requirements as well as program needs within the system. Learners have a responsibility to make informed choices regarding their studies, through formal or informal education.

Quality: quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their learning goals. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided. Alberta demonstrates a desire to continually strive for superior quality in the advanced education system.

Responsive: the system must have the capacity to respond to demands for flexibility from learners. The advanced education system must also be able to adapt to challenges and opportunities that may arise in the future.

Sustainable: Alberta's advanced education system plans today so that the system can continue to meet the needs of advancing education in the future.

3 Alberta's Advanced Education System

Before considering the key issues, opportunities and challenges facing the future structure and evolution of the system, it is important to have a common understanding as to what the system comprises.

Alberta's advanced education system consists of both formal and informal learning offered through public board-governed institutions, community consortia, private providers and community-based organizations – all offering a broad range of credit and non-credit programs and courses to learners throughout the province and beyond. Numerous stakeholders, boards and councils support the system by providing planning and policy advice to Alberta Advanced Educ[illegible]nd the Minister. It is important to recognize that many other entities play [illegible] within the system, including schools, employers, and many non-p[illegible]cies. Needless to say, although many organizations and individuals [illegible]rect role within the advanced education system, all Albertans hav[illegible]utcomes of the advanced education system.

The following provides an overview o[illegible] organizations, which are more directly involved in the system of advanced educa[illegible]

3.1 Public Board-governed Institutions

There are twenty-one public, board-governed institutions in Alberta, consisting of four universities, fourteen colleges, two technical institutes and the Banff Centre for Continuing Education. Alberta's public, board-governed institutions operate under authority of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*. These institutions offer a variety of credit learning opportunities, including skills training, trade certificate, certificate, diploma, applied degree, degree and graduate level programs, as well as non-credit learning.

The public, board-governed institutions receive grants from Alberta Advanced Education to support the delivery of credit instruction. Non-credit courses and programs are funded primarily through student fees and do not require program approval from the Minister of Advanced Education.

3.2 Community Consortia

Community consortia coordinate the delivery of credit learning opportunities to learners in communities not directly served by an advanced education institution. There are four community consortia in Alberta:

- Big Country Educational Consortium (Drumheller/Stettler region);
- Chinook Educational Consortium (Pincher Creek/Crowsnest Pass region);
- Pembina Educational Consortium (Drayton Valley/Whitecourt region); and
- Yellowhead Region Educational Consortium (Edson/Jasper region).

The consortia work to identify a community's learning interests and then match these interests with the teaching capabilities of public board-governed institutions. Provincial grants to support program, capital, and administrative needs are provided through Alberta Advanced Education's Community Consortium Program Grant. Consortia also pursue additional funding opportunities through other Alberta Advanced Education programs, as well as other ministries, governments, and agencies.

3.3 Private Providers

Alberta's advanced education system includes both for-profit and not-for-profit private providers, who offer a range of credit and non-credit programming. There are currently eight private providers delivering degree programs accredited by the former Private College's Accreditation Board in disciplines such as arts, science and education.

In addition to private providers with degree granting status, Alberta's advanced education system includes other private providers that offer non-regulated, non-credit divinity degree programs. These institutions, commonly referred to as bible colleges, do not offer academic degrees, and have affiliations with Canadian or American theological schools or associations. Divinity degrees do not require the approval of the Minister of Advanced Education and must be named in such a manner as to distinguish them from academic degrees.

There are also more than 140 private institutions, incorporated under the *Companies Act* and *Societies Act*, or their own Act of the Alberta Legislature, offering programs that are licensed under authority of the *Private Vocational Schools Act*. These programs are vocation specific, generally less than one-year in duration, and are created to respond to current labour market demands. Private institutions may also offer non-licensed, unregulated, non-credit programs or courses.

3.4 Non-Resident Degree Granting Institutions

There are currently eleven degree-granting institutions (private and public) from outside the province that have permission from the Minister to offer specific degree programs in Alberta. Like public post-secondary institutions, the *Post-secondary Learning Act* requires non-resident institutions to submit new degree proposals to the Minister who may refer the proposal to the Campus Alberta Quality Council for review.

3.5 Community-based Providers

Alberta Advanced Education supports a range of non-profit voluntary organizations that provide part-time, non-credit learning opportunities with an emphasis on adults with barriers to accessing learning. Support is provided through grants to 83 Community Adult Learning Councils, 73 volunteer tutor adult literacy programs and over 40 family literacy programs – all three provide direct programming to adults. Additionally, grants are provided to three support organizations (the Community Learning Network, Literacy Alberta and the Centre for Family Literacy) to provide professional development. Further funding is provided for development and distribution of resources such as English Express, a newspaper for adults learning to read English.

3.6 Supporting Boards and Councils

A number of boards and councils provide coordination, planning and policy advice to the Minister of Advanced Education. These boards and councils include:

Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfers (ACAT): provides advice and support to the Minister of Advanced Education on policies, guidelines and procedures to facilitate transfer agreements among Alberta's publicly funded advanced education providers. ACAT encourages negotiations among institutions with the goal of expanding educational opportunities for Alberta students. ACAT also publishes the annual Alberta Transfer Guide to provide students with accurate information on admission and transfer opportunities.

Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board (AAITB): provides advice to the Minister of Advanced Education on labour market trends and needs, as well as training and certification requirements for trades and designated occupations. In addition to its advisory role, AAITB sets training and certification standards for trades and designated occupations, appoints members for various trades-related committees, develops regulations for the Minister's approval, and develops policies to recognize equivalent training programs.

Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC): reviews degree proposals from resident and non-resident advanced education institutions (public and private) interested in offering new degree programs. The CAQC's primary role is to ensure program quality and to make recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education – the Minister retains a system-coordinating role.

Students Finance Board (SFB): provides advice to the Minister of Advanced Education on matters related to student financial assistance and scholarships. In addition to this advisory role and on the Minister's behalf, SFB may also conduct investigations or research into issues related to student financial assistance.

4 Current Framework to Support System Development

The governing body at universities, colleges, technical institutes and Banff Centre is the Board of Governors, as established by the *Post-secondary Learning Act*, which specifies the composition of the board. The boards are accountable to the Minister of Advanced Education. The *Post Secondary Learning Act* and its regulations define the powers and duties of the Board, including accountability requirements. Boards are accountable for institutions' business plans and budget, annual reports, financial and any other information as requested by the Minister. Through the business plans, the Ministry and public providers articulate planned system direction through the identification of goals, objectives and specific strategies. Through the annual reporting cycle, financial statements, and performance measures, public institutions report on outcomes achieved.

Under the authority of the *Post Secondary Learning Act*, the Minister approves the mandate for each public post-secondary institution. Effectively, the approved mandate of a public post-secondary institution specifies the types and level of programs to be offered, for example, certificate, diploma, apprenticeship, and degree; and, where appropriate, may also specify the geographic service region, the mode of delivery, the type of client group to be served, or other special functions such as international education. The board of a public post-secondary institution may not engage in, or carry on, any activity that is not within the approved mandate.

The Minister, through approval of mandates and credit programs, provides direction in terms of the programs offered by the public board-governed institutions. Beyond the overall mandate, the Minister is also responsible for approving new programs of study, program terminations, and significant expansions or changes to credentials offered within the public system. Where a new program proposal or change proposal has implications for other parts of the system, the ministry expects that consultations will have occurred with impacted institutions.

The *Post-secondary Learning Act* also makes provisions for coordination and approval of any new degree proposal submitted by both public and private institutions. All degree proposals are submitted to the Minister who may refer them to the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) for review. Alberta Advanced Education is responsible for system coordination review, including assessment of market and student demand. The CAQC, an arms-length quality assurance agency, makes recommendations to the Minister on applications from post-secondary institutions wishing to offer new degree

programs. The CAQC is responsible for conducting an organizational review of the proposing institution to assess capacity and readiness and to ensure that new degrees meet standards of quality.

Targeted growth and innovation in the post-secondary system is also managed through conditional funding envelopes, such as the Access Growth Fund. Alberta Advanced Education and institutional priorities together determine program areas for expansion. Targeted funding facilitates system responsiveness and makes efficient and effective use of financial resources in areas that are consistent with planned business plan directions. In addition to facilitating priority areas for growth, funding envelopes have often placed a priority on proposals that encourage collaboration and sharing of resources in the system.

Alberta has approximately 140 private institutions offering licensed vocational programs under authority of the *Private Vocational Schools Act*. These programs are vocation specific, generally less than one-year in duration, and are created to respond to current labour market demands. New program licensing proposals are reviewed by Alberta Advanced Education across a range of factors including program demand.

Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system is an industry-driven system. Industry (employers and employees) establishes training and certification standards and provides direction to the system through an industry committee network and the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. The Board's primary responsibility is to establish the standards and requirements for training and certification in programs under the *Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act*. The Board also makes recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education about the needs of Alberta's labour market for skilled and trained workers, and the designation of trades and occupations.

Individual employers support the apprenticeship and industry training system by employing and training apprentices, providing them with an opportunity to develop their skills on the job. They also support the system by contributing equipment and other resources for technical training.

The Alberta government provides the legislative framework and administrative support for the apprenticeship and industry training system. Alberta Advanced Education works with industry, employer and employee organizations and technical training providers to facilitate the development and maintenance of industry training and certification standards; provide registration and counseling services to apprentices and employers; coordinate technical training in collaboration with institutions; and certify apprentices and others who meet industry standards.

Alberta Advanced Education's Apprenticeship and Industry Training division works closely with post-secondary institutions to ensure that there are adequate training spaces to meet both the needs of industry and the needs of apprentices. There are eight primary institutions within Alberta that provide apprenticeship programs for fifty-five designated trades and occupations. Alberta Advanced Education works closely with each institution to assess demand levels for each designated trade and occupation and to ensure there are adequate resources in place to support training requirements. Each of the eight institutions is base funded for a specific level of activity. Resource requirements beyond this level are funded through the Access Growth Fund.

5 Challenges and Opportunities

5.1 The Changing Needs of the Learner and Future Program Needs

As indicated in other supporting documents, including *Increasing Accessibility to Advanced Education for Under-represented Albertans*, and *Advanced Education in Rural Alberta: Challenges and Opportunities*, Alberta's demographic profile is changing significantly. These documents indicate that future enrolment increases will depend largely upon our capacity to increase participation among groups currently under-represented within the system, including Aboriginal people, rural and low income Albertans. Alberta's future success and prosperity will also depend upon our ability to attract international and inter-provincial migrants. The growth in the Aboriginal population, which is growing three times faster than the non-Aboriginal population, will place new pressures on our learning system. At the same time, Alberta's population growth has tended to concentrate in urban areas.

In addition to a changing demographic profile and the need for suitable programs for learners, it is also important to ensure that learners are able to find employment and contribute to society upon graduation. A key consideration in shaping the future direction of the system is the future demand by both learners and industry for certificate, diploma, apprenticeship, and degree programs.

The *Profile of Alberta's Advanced Education System* identifies a number of key trends that will influence future system direction. Projections released by Canada Human Resources and Skills Development indicate that 64.4% of all new jobs created between 2003 and 2013 in Alberta would require some form of post-secondary training. Projections indicate that roughly half of those will require a diploma or certificate (including apprenticeship), while half will require a university degree, or higher level of qualification.

It is also important to consider that over the past decade in Alberta, for every three jobs created for those with post-secondary qualifications, two of three have been for individuals with certificate, diploma or apprenticeship qualifications, while one in three has been for degree holders. Over the last ten years, from 1994 and 2004, employment among those who had completed a post-secondary diploma or certificate (including

apprenticeship training) increased the fastest of all the education attainment categories. Employment for this group went up by a total of 186,700 or 46.7%. During the same period, employment among Albertans who had completed university rose by 92,800 or 41.4%.

There is a high expectation that there will be a strong demand for a full range of certificate, diploma and degree programs. Currently, in Alberta, 43% of enrolment within the public institutions is comprised of enrolment in certificate, diploma and apprenticeship programs, whereas 57% of enrolment within the public system is comprised of enrolment in university transfer, degree, graduate, and applied degree programs.

Planning for the future shape of the system will need to consider the types of programs that respond to a changing profile of student. To what extent do we have the right mix of programs and institutions to accommodate the future needs of students and of industry? Reflecting upon demographic changes, to what extent are our current programs configured to meet the needs of future students in terms of counseling, provision of information, guidance, literacy, or other student supports? To what extent will program mix need to shift to respond to a changing demographic profile?

5.2 Adding Value through Partnership and Collaboration

As indicated in the *Investing in Alberta's Advanced Education System* discussion document, it is important to consider ways in which collaborative efforts can achieve better results for the system.

Partnerships and collaboration between institutions, government and industry have been important elements in the development of the advanced education system in Alberta. Partnerships and other collaborative initiatives within the system can be viewed in many different contexts or dimensions and include the full realm of activities within the system. They include partnerships aimed at instruction and development of programs. They also include administrative, community service, and research partnerships.

With respect to instructional and curriculum development activities, there are many partnerships that have been established to enhance system outcomes. Alberta North and eCampus Alberta are two notable examples of how access can be enhanced through the leveraging of technology and shared instruction and instructional development efforts of multiple organizations.

Alberta-North is a partnership of eight post-secondary institutions that extend post-secondary learning opportunities to over 80 communities in Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Through this network of community access points, Alberta North provides the learner supports necessary to access post-secondary education and ensure learner success.

eCampusAlberta is a consortium of colleges and technical institutes that have formed a partnership to develop and deliver on-line courses and programs. Although in the initial stages of development, there are nearly 200 courses available on-line through eCampusAlberta. Each institution develops, contributes, and offers its respective online courseware, but also offers other institutions' courseware. Currently learners have online access to about 200 courses from a wide variety of institutions. This collaborative effort is designed to increase and strengthen online offerings amongst the institutions as well as promote seamless access for prospective learners. This strategic and responsive approach ensures that all learners can access post-secondary on-line learning opportunities at a time and means convenient to them. The participating institutions have articulated their commitment to the priorities of quality, access, transferability and partnerships in the provision of online learning opportunities to all learners.

As a means to enhance transition of students between high school and advanced education opportunities, a number of program related initiatives have been developed. One notable example is in the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). RAP is an apprenticeship program for high school students who are ready to get started learning and practicing their future trade while in high school. RAP students divide their time between an approved work site and their high school and are considered both full-time students and registered apprentices.

To enhance the provision of information to learners, parents and prospective learners, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Advanced Education established the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS). ALIS is an on-line gateway for career planning, post-secondary education and training, educational funding, job searching, and employment information. The website allows for a one stop gateway providing service and information for students across sectors and institutions.

Through the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), Alberta post-secondary institutions, learners, and Alberta Advanced Education establish policies and procedures with respect to admission and transfer, prior learning assessment and recognition, and the awarding of transfer credit. Prior to the 1970's, evaluating the transferability of a student's learning experience was done at an individual student level. This required evaluation of individual transcripts on a course-by-course basis. Not only was this a laborious task, but there were also inconsistent results.

To address this problem, Alberta post-secondary institutions and the provincial government worked together to establish ACAT. The Council's mandate included the development and maintenance of a system of inter-institutional, intra-provincial credit transfer agreements. These agreements define what courses and programs are transferable between institutions. The existence of these agreements allows a student to transfer earned credit between institutions with predictability and to use credits earned at one institution to fulfill program requirements at another, eliminating the need to repeat learning experiences.

It is important to consider what further enhancements can be made to Alberta's transfer system. While many courses throughout the system are transferable, to what extent might the transfer system be enhanced to allow for the laddering of programs, for example, the laddering of diploma programs to degree programs? Within a context of more fluid transition of learners to and from work, and the need for lifelong learning, laddering will become more and more important. As well, it will be increasingly important to establish a framework to allow for recognition of prior learning and experience. What recommendations can be made concerning the effective application of prior learning assessment?

Many of the aforementioned relate directly to the provision of programs of instruction or information relating to programs and services within the system. However, partnerships can also be established to allow for more effective provision of non-instructional activities. There are many opportunities that would allow for shared services or resourcing, including human and financial services, common technological platforms, or application and enrolment management systems for instance. To what extent can collaborative action among providers achieve better results by combining resources currently applied toward systems, enrolment and application systems, financial and human resources?

As indicated in earlier sections, Alberta's advanced education system consists of both publicly funded providers and private providers. What are the most effective vehicles to ensure the balance of public, non-profit and private providers supports high quality education? What can be done to facilitate partnerships between public and private providers?

5.3 Infrastructure Planning

Planning for infrastructure is a key component of system development and coordination, to respond to learner access needs, as well as to balance facility preservation and maintenance. The landscape for development of facilities and is changing significantly, influenced by the growth of technology, the growth in research, emerging partnerships between the public and private sector, schools and hospitals, as well as new ways of financing infrastructure development.

There are a number of examples of institutions partnering with health authorities, school jurisdictions and community agencies to develop capital projects that meet a broad range of regional needs. Examples include the recently announced Health Science Ambulatory Learning Centre that is a joint project between the University of Alberta and Capital Health. There are other examples within the system of facilities that are jointly used by school divisions, social agencies and advanced education institutions.

These partnerships promote the engagement of communities within advanced education, as well as other stakeholders that have a vested interest in the outcomes and success of the advanced education system. In addition to allowing for effective utilization of space, such partnerships may also enhance access and participation. For example, the presence of advanced education institutions within the basic education system allows for many innovative approaches to instruction, including preparation and awareness strategies.

To what extent should the capital planning process promote partnerships between post-secondary institutions and other jurisdictions to create regional facilities? What are appropriate measures that could be used to determine the impact of multi-use, integrated facilities? In what ways can the capital planning process be enhanced to allow for effective system planning?

5.4 The Global Community

Globalization is profoundly impacting Alberta's post-secondary system and Alberta's industries. Through the internet, enhancements to communications, and democratization, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, bringing people and cultures together like never before. Reduced barriers to the flow of capital and other factors of production, the emergence of e-commerce, the trend to outsourcing and off-shoring, and the emergence of China and India as major trading forces, have all had the impact of significantly increasing competition. Canada's productivity lags behind that of many OECD countries including the United States. With the growth of many third world countries and their lower labour costs, coupled with freer movement of capital, there is no question that productivity improvements in Canada will be imperative. Over time, there is an expectation that as world economies evolve, the more labour intensive manufacturing industries of well developed economies will move production to less developed countries. The implication is that Alberta's future quality of life and capacity for innovation will depend upon our ability to leverage the new medium of exchange – knowledge.

Our ability to transition to a knowledge-based economy with a strong foundation for innovation and knowledge creation means that we need to open our doors to the outside world. If Alberta's advanced education system is to excel within the international community, our graduates must have the global perspective and relevant skills to allow them to succeed on an international stage. If we expect to nurture a strong culture of innovation allowing Alberta's graduates and businesses and other organizations to compete within an international arena using the latest technology, practices, and skills, then as a society we cannot be insular. And, if we want this outcome for our society, then the first step in nurturing this global perspective rests with our learning institutions.

It is critical that Alberta's advanced education system support a strong foundation for international education. What is meant by international education? An international strategy for advanced education in Alberta has many different dimensions. It means

ensuring that our courses and programs are relevant from an international perspective or internationalized. Our students should acquire international and intercultural skills to allow them to work within an interconnected and diverse world. Many of our business graduates for instance, should have knowledge of international trade practices, trends and opportunities. For that matter, our graduates should have the foreign language skills that would allow them to work with business to identify opportunities or acquire knowledge on best practices in other countries.

International education also means that international students seek Alberta as a destination for advanced education or to live and work beyond graduation. Compared to other jurisdictions within Canada, Alberta attracts fewer international students than average. For Canada, 4.8% of the undergraduate student base comes from other jurisdictions. This compares with 4% for Alberta. International students bring an important perspective to the classroom and communities in which they live. Many international students return to their home countries after graduation. However, the big picture perspective on international education recognizes that a strong international student base is usually a precursor to enhanced economic and social linkages between countries.

On a similar note, effective international education strategies also involve the development of opportunities for learners or instructors to work or study abroad. These overseas experiences provide participants with powerful ways of acquiring and integrating knowledge of other countries and cultures through direct experience.

International education is about the cross-fertilization of ideas. By nurturing a strong international education program we are able to acquire best practices from other jurisdictions, ensure our programs meet the highest standards, be more innovative, enhance trade and social ties with other countries, and we are able to build a stronger foundation for our immigration programs.

As indicated in earlier sections, non-resident providers require ministerial approval to offer degree programs in Alberta. What is the role for non-resident degree providers in Alberta? Should we be encouraging non-resident institutions to offer degree programs in Alberta?

In considering how we can shape Alberta's advanced education system for the future, we need to consider how we can collectively enhance our international education programs. What collaborative strategies can be initiated to allow for the attraction and retention of foreign students or to ensure that a greater proportion of foreign students remain in Alberta beyond graduation? What efforts can be undertaken to allow for the attraction and retention of faculty and researchers? What collaborative efforts might be made to market Alberta's advanced education system in other jurisdictions, or to internationalize our courses and programs?

5.5 Community and Economic Development

Providers have a key role to play within regional communities as catalysts for community renewal. In addition to enhancing the skill level of their communities, advanced education institutions act as repositories of knowledge and expertise for community leaders, organizations, and the private sector. Advanced education institutions have a key role to play within communities, enhancing the management capacity and regional innovation capacity, by working with industry to identify human resource needs and to identify market opportunities.

Providers also have a key role to play to raise participation levels. Raising awareness of the importance of advanced education, to inspire youth to aspire to advanced education at an early age, and to provide quality information on career opportunities is a tremendous undertaking. It requires the collaborative efforts and engagement of all stakeholders, including schools, public and private institutions, community consortia, community adult learning councils, literacy groups, Aboriginal communities, guidance counselors, parents, career development centres, and other community organizations. Stimulating innovative thinking requires the involvement of diverse community stakeholders. Communities are best positioned to identify emerging issues, barriers, and opportunities, as well as develop creative solutions to increase access and participation.

What suggestions are there to further engage communities in advanced education? In what ways can advanced education institutions expand their roles as agents of community and economic development? Is there a role for Alberta Advanced Education to enhance the relationship between institutions and communities?

5.6 Leveraging Technology

As previously discussed, advancements in technology and the application of technology holds tremendous potential in assisting Alberta's advanced education system to achieve its objectives. Using technology assists in the creation of unlimited opportunities by removing barriers to access and bridging limitations posed by time and geography. For example, the development of the Alberta SuperNet is now allowing 420 communities across the province to access broadband, high-speed internet. The SuperNet uses fibre and wireless capabilities to connect schools, post-secondary institutions, hospitals, libraries, and government offices throughout Alberta.

In terms of enhancing program development and program delivery, technology has already been put to use in creating new curriculum tools and resources. Advancements in communication, such as the Alberta SuperNet, as well as computer and internet-based learning are allowing programs to be delivered to remote communities, community learning access centres, and directly into learners' homes and work sites. Alberta North and eCampus Alberta are examples of how communication and technological advancements may form the basis for enhanced system outcomes. As a result of these

developments, online learning has already had a strong impact on increasing accessibility, enhancing collaboration among institutions and program deliverers, and, ultimately, expanding the range of learning opportunities across Alberta.

Of key importance is ensuring that using technology to expand access and enhance program delivery continues to be fully leveraged. Given the changing needs of diverse learners and the goal to increase participation of non-traditional learners, developing new technology and using technology in innovative ways will be even more fundamental. For example, assistive devices, such as voice recognition software, ergonomic supports, or listening devices, are essential to increasing access for disabled learners.

Moreover, achieving the goal of increasing access by 60,000 learning opportunities will require creative thinking on how to expand access beyond the traditional method of creating more physical space. As an example, there may be key opportunities to convert core course curriculum (used as a foundation for many different programs) to a distance learning or digital format. Similarly, there may be opportunities to identify key courses that could be offered as an option to high school students to receive advanced credit or as a basis to inspire others to participate in advanced education programs.

Beyond expanding access and capacity, leveraging technology also holds potential for other areas of advanced education. For example, technological developments in communication are helping to bring together researchers and other innovators located across the globe. These dynamic, global networks are spurring research and development activity within Alberta's advanced education system – which in turn stimulates a more knowledge-based economy. As Alberta's colleges and technical institutes explore new areas of applied research, technology will play a pivotal role in advancing new applications and enhancing collaboration throughout the innovation system.

Technology is also allowing greater interconnectivity among post-secondary institutions and government in terms of data and information sharing capacity. A growing knowledge and information base assists decision-makers within institutions and government to create informed policies based on best practices. Faster access to information also improves learner services and supports such as application processes and mechanisms to facilitate student transfers among institutions. And technological developments are now allowing student financial aid assessments to occur in real-time, which reduces delays in informing students of available financial resources.

In what ways can we leverage the full potential of technology as a means to enhance access and program quality, while ensuring system sustainability? Are there other ways that technology can be leveraged to enhance collaboration and expand system capacity? Is there potential for exploring new collaborative avenues with the K-12 education system to expand access and capacity, and improve high school to post-secondary transitions?

5.7 Private Sector Contribution

Alberta's private sector has identified skill and labour shortages as a significant threat to continuing high productivity and growth of Alberta's economy. At the same time, recent data from Statistics Canada suggest the private sector could take a larger role in developing the skills of Alberta's labour force.

2002 data from Statistics Canada's Adult Education and Training Survey indicate that Albertans have among the lowest employer-supported participation rates in formal, job-related training in the country. Alberta's rate was 25.1%, the fifth lowest in Canada and below rates in Nova Scotia (28.9%), Manitoba (27.9%) and Saskatchewan (27.4%). Further, Alberta's rate dropped from 25.8% in 1997 to 25.1% in 2002 (whereas the national rate increased from 22.4% to 25.0% over the same period).

Within Alberta, the private sector has high expectations that graduates of Alberta's advanced education system should have all the necessary skills and knowledge to allow them to be immediate and productive members of the labour force. It is recognized however that the private sector also has a role to play in terms of developing people and allowing for skills development. It is important to consider ways in which the private sector can provide a greater contribution to the development of human capital.

6 Key Questions

As mentioned in earlier sections of this discussion document, the purpose of this paper is to generate feedback on the existing structure of the system and how our system can be shaped to meet the needs of learners and respond to future needs and challenges. To help guide written submissions prepared in response to this document, key questions are identified below.

1. Have all the relevant issues and opportunities been identified in the paper? If not, what are the other key areas that require consideration and discussion?
2. Are the principles guiding future direction of the system appropriate? Are there further principles that require consideration?
3. Given changing demographics and profile of the learner, in what ways can our supports for the learner, delivery mechanisms, and programs, including the balance of certificate, diploma, and degree level programs, be configured to meet the needs of the learner?
4. In what ways can partnerships (instructional, delivery, curriculum development) be further leveraged as a basis to enhance learner access and program quality?
5. In what ways can partnerships (administrative, financial, systems) be encouraged?

6. What are your recommendations concerning the enhancement of Alberta's system of transferability and laddering of programs?
7. What are your recommendations concerning the implementation of a framework to allow for expanded use of prior learning assessment and recognition?
8. What are your recommendations concerning the internationalization of Alberta's advanced education system? What priority strategies would support an enhanced international education strategy?
9. In what ways can technology be fully leveraged to enhance access and quality within the advanced education system?
10. In what ways can the private sector provide a greater contribution to the development of human capital in Alberta?

Appendix – Draft Glossary of Terms

Advanced Education System: The entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong, improve their technical or professional qualifications, further develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge with their purpose: a) to complete a level of formal education; b) to acquire knowledge and skills in a new field; c) to refresh or update their knowledge in a particular field. (Asia/ Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO Literacy Glossary http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/glossary/indexm.htm)

Apprentice: An individual who is engaged in an apprenticeship program. (Advanced Education)

Articulation/Transfer: A cooperative agreement that involves successful completion of a credit-course or credit-program from a sending institution, entitling the student to advanced standing in a credit program at a receiving institution. The student must still be admitted to the targeted/receiving institution. This type of arrangement is typical of university transfer programs. (Advanced Education)

College: An institution that provides comprehensive programs that lead directly to employment or to further education. Colleges may provide skills development programs, academic upgrading, university-transfer programs, certificates, diplomas, applied degrees and undergraduate degrees. (Advanced Education)

Community: People who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, background, or geography. (Adapted from Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

Community Consortia: Alberta's four community consortia offer credit programs in communities not directly served by a publicly funded post-secondary institution. Consortia partner with publicly -funded postsecondary institutions and local communities to provide learning opportunities in disciplines of interest to the community. (Profile of Alberta's Adult Learning System: A Context for Discussion, Appendix C: Glossary)

Community Adult Learning Councils (CALCs): The mandate of CALCs is to mobilize resources in their communities to offer coordinated, comprehensive, and meaningful courses and projects to meet the learning needs of adults. The 83 Community Adult Learning Councils located across the province of Alberta provide non-credit learning opportunities to adults in English as a Second Language/French as a Second Language, literacy, employability enhancement and community issues. Councils respond to their communities' unique learning needs and are a place to find information on local learning opportunities. (Advanced Education).

Credit Programs: Generally, credit programs are programs approved by the Minister of Advanced Education where successful completion results in the conferment of a parchment signed by the chair of the institution's Board of Governors. In contrast, non-credit programs do not require the Ministerial approval and do not result in a Board-endorsed parchment. (Advanced Education)

Formal Education: Education or training provided in educational institutions such as schools, universities, colleges, etc. or on-the-job in a workplace, usually involving direction from a teacher or instructor. (Queensland Government http://www.tafe.qld.gov.au/tools/glossary/glossary_f.html)

Formal Learning: Learning that is conducted/sponsored by an educational or training organization and leads to some form of recognized certification such as a degree, diploma or certificate. (National Adult Literacy Database http://www.nald.ca/adultlearningcourse/glossary.htm#f)

Informal Education: Casual and continuous learning from life experiences outside organized formal or non-formal education (note: do not confuse with "non-school educational programs" or "non-formal education") (Education Resources Information Center)

Institution: An established organization, usually of a public nature, dedicated to an educational, economic, political, religious, charitable, or other social purpose -- includes foundations, societies, corporations, etc. (Education Resources Information Center)

Learning: The act, process, or experience of gaining knowledge or skill. (American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language, Fourth Edition)

Learner: A person who gains knowledge or understanding of or skill in by study, instruction, or experience. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Lifelong Learning: Learning that begins in early childhood and continues into the senior years. It is about learning how to learn, and acquiring and applying knowledge and skills throughout life. It is about learning to keep up, stay fresh, and have up-to-date skills, while enjoying a high quality of life and being active and responsible citizens. Lifelong learning takes many forms and occurs in many settings, including: formal education offered in schools and post-secondary institutions; learning on the job site; literacy and other programs offered through community centers or libraries; learning in professional organizations or clubs; learning at home; and a combination of the above. Lifelong learning can be self-directed or supported by teachers, professors, instructors, employers, co-workers, mentors, family members, and friends. (MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning, 1999)

Non-school Educational Programs: Programs with formal educational intent offered by institutions or organizations other than schools, e.g., businesses, churches, community agencies, etc. (note: do not confuse with "home schooling" or "non-formal education") (Education Resources Information Center)

Non-formal Education: Organized education without formal schooling or institutionalization in which knowledge, skills, and values are taught by relatives, peers, or other community members. (note: do not confuse with "non-school educational programs" or "informal education") (Education Resources Information Center)

Nontraditional Education: Educational programs that are offered as alternatives within or without the formal educational system and provide innovative and flexible instruction, curriculum, grading systems, or degree requirements. (Education Resources Information Center)

Providers: Alberta's adult learning opportunities are facilitated through providers. These providers can be public (universities, colleges, technical institutes, community consortia), private (private university colleges, unregulated private colleges), and community based (community adult learning councils). (Profile of Alberta's Adult Learning System: A Context for Discussion, Appendix C: Glossary)

Quality: Meeting a threshold by satisfying (or exceeding) appropriate criteria. (Advanced Education)

Quality Assessment: The process of systematic gathering and use of information to judge the quality of a higher education institution as a whole (institutional assessment) or of its education programs (program assessment). (Advanced Education)

Quality Assurance: An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, and/or programs. (Advanced Education)

Quality System: One that strives to continuously improve in meeting the expectations of learners, society, and the economy. (Advanced Education)

Student: One who studies something. (American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language, Fourth Edition)

System: A regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

System Coordination: To achieve efficiency and effectiveness, new programs and changes to existing programs are reviewed and approved with reference to the post-secondary system. Coordination of post-secondary institutions' activities is a responsibility of institutions and government. For this reason, the Minister approves institution's mandate statement, new programs and significant changes to existing programs. Alberta Advanced Education monitors the system to ensure responsiveness to emerging educational and labour market trends, unfavourable gaps and overlaps in programming. This function is intended to eliminate unwarranted program duplication, encourage institutional collaboration and foster commitment to appropriate student access. Amongst other things, institutional leaders are expected to consult and seek support of other institutions in new program proposals, where appropriate, and to demonstrate appropriate employer and industry demand. (Advanced Education)

Technical Institute: An institute that offers programs that provides a practical, hands-on approach to learning the technical skills that make graduates immediately effective on the job. Curriculum is supplemented with a range of activities designed to give students maximum exposure to the practical applications of what they learn. Technical institutes may confer certificates, diplomas, applied degrees and undergraduate degrees. They offer a variety of certificate, diploma and four-year applied degrees in the trades and technology fields and coordinate most apprentice programs in Alberta. (Definition taken from descriptions provided by both NAIT, SAIT and Central Alberta Career Prep.)

University: An institution that offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, and graduate levels. Its faculty and students engage in research within and across the major disciplines comprising the program areas, and provide research expertise and services to the community and to national and international organizations. (Advanced Education)

Vocational College: A college that provides programs of instruction or training that assists adult learners to acquire foundations of basic skills. (*Post Secondary Learning Act*, Section 45(2))